

A MANDATE FOR QUALITY EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Justice Clement Haynesworth's (Chief Judge Fourth Circuit, Richmond, Virginia) decision December 2, is destined to have great educational influence, not only on the three administrative units involved—Reidsville City Schools, Statesville City Schools, Durham County Schools—on all public schools in North Carolina—indeed the Southern portion of the United States. Pressures are now being brought by new legal action and HEW mandates that will necessitate re-evaluation of present pupil assignment plans and subsequently mandatory total integration. Justice Haynesworth's decision was, in the truest sense, a legalistic interpretation of the Constitution of the United States concerning pupil attendance in public schools. However, the decision carried with it hidden educational implication of the highest magnitude—educational implication that will test the leadership abilities of the North Carolina public schools.

Under the most favorable circumstances, entering a new school, meeting new classmates, adjusting to new school environment, and having a new teacher are not always happy emotional experiences for children. Moreover, moving into a different school in the middle of the school year greatly complicates and aggravates the teaching-learning atmosphere which both teacher and pupil have labored hard since the beginning of the school year to establish. A few children could have severe traumatic experiences leaving emotional and educational scars that might be long in healing. While these negative aspects are a part of the obvious dilemma, there is no real educational reason for extolling disillusionment and pessimism. Indeed, meeting new classmates, having a different educational environment, and interaction with a new teaching personality can be wonderful educational experiences. Children who are teachable, loved, motivated, and a high level of aspira-

tion will have no difficulty making the adjustment. After all, the ingredients of upheaval and change are the matrix of the Ungraded School and Individual Personalized Instruction. The salient magnified imperative is, that with exceptions, the only children who will have trouble in making the adjustment are those children who are already having conflicts. And, isn't it a beautiful educational thought that some children who are already bogged down in a meaningless educational experience, perhaps, will get another chance—and in the same school year!

What this new pupil assignment plan calls for, educationally speaking, is a mandate for quality educational leadership which is without precedent in the North Carolina public schools. Socrates, a long time ago, said, "Whom then do I call educated? Those who control circumstances instead of being mastered by them, those who meet all occasions manfully and act in accordance with intelligent thinking, those who are honorable persons in all dealings who treat good-naturedly persons and things that are disagreeable."

The North Carolina public schools have a peculiar and particular educational condition imposed by the Fourth Circuit Court which might, on the surface, indicate that these are circumstances for which they have no control. However, as Socrates has indicated, one of the first marks of an educated person is one who can control and give direction to circumstances instead of being mastered by them. We submit to you that quality educational leadership in the face of what appears to be an impending crisis is in the truest Socratic manner an opportunity to respond as educated people by providing meaningful educational direction.

Leadership in any society comes from varying levels. In public education it comes from at least the Board of Education, the superintendent and his staff, the principal of individual schools, the teacher in the classrooms, and the parents in the community. The Board of Education and the superintendent and his staff are already setting in motion conditions and influences which will optimize every educational opportunity for all children.

Principal. The principal is the chief executive of any school building. He is responsible for preparing the "educational environment" for all concerned—teacher, pupil, programs, etc., etc. The "educational environment" is the matrix of any teaching-learning process. This is a difficult task under what might be called normal conditions; but when the conditions are exacerbated by total upheaval in the middle of the school year, then the mandate for quality educational leadership takes on different proportions and meanings. One cannot spell out in this short paper the detail encapsulating ingredients for sound "educational environment." However, two major priorities for good "educational environment" is the magnification of personalities and opportunities for both teachers and students. This is done through optimum utilization and involvement of total resources committed to the principal by the Board of Education. Optimum utilization and involvement develops most favorably *by feeding the opportunities and starving the problems*. In the words of Socrates, controlling the circumstances instead of being controlled is the hallmark of professional educational leadership.

Teachers. William Glasser in his great book, **SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE**, has said if the school is a success and the home a failure, the child will succeed. The success of public schooling is in direct proportion to the success of the teachers. In this moment of educational upheaval, we need teachers who can properly awaken and develop the sense of humanity in every pupil; teachers, who with Schopenhauer, can discern and release for creativity the universal will in every child; teacher, who can with Hegel, teach the universal purpose of existence; teachers, who can with Albert Schweitzer, teach "reverence for life"; teachers who can, with Pitran Sorokin, teach by precept and example, regardless of race or color, the "altruism" of life. These are not esoteric unrealistic qualities superimposed on the teaching profession in time of crisis; rather, they are personal traits educational leaders must develop and possess if educational experiences are to be translucent. As Emerson has said, "It isn't so much what you study, it's who your teachers are."

If our assumption is correct, with exception, only children who already have troubles are the ones who will experience difficulties; then it is our fundamental belief that the only way teachers can teach the unteachable, love the unloveable, motivate the unmotivatable, and raise the level of aspiration for these children is for the classroom teachers to manifest an intense change in desire, purpose, and commitment to children. Then, children can say, as Goethe said of his old art teacher, "Under him we learned nothing but became something."

William James has said, "Teaching is an art"; what the teacher does to the subject and pupil is the manifested importance; good teaching is simply working "your pupil into such a state of interest in what you are going to teach him that every other object of attention is banished from his mind; then reveal it to him so impressively that he will remember the occasion to his dying day . . ." Professor James, likewise, realized the pupil's mind and other elements were enemies of good teaching — that strategies leading to defeat were as apparent in the classroom as victories. Teachers have labored long and hard since last September building strategies for success, rapport, understanding individual differences and capacities, building schemes of motivation, and raising levels of aspiration. Now, all this must be redone. If, however, these were the only difficulties, the teacher might easily come to grips with the problems. But, in the middle of the school year, children bringing with them educational scars, stops, starts, educational gaps, educational expectancies, competences and negative family influences, the strategies of defeat are in full battle dress. We must, however, in the truest Socratic manner gear to control the flow of difficulties. The challenge, therefore, born of difficult circumstances must elicit from teachers maximum efforts, energies, strategies, and commitment that will, by example, in historical retrospect say, "this was their finest hour." If we but realize the opportunities instead of the problems, *if we feed the opportunities and starve the problems*, then we and our pupils can sing with Browning, "The best is yet to be."

Parents. We have already mentioned William Glasser's book, *SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE*, but we allude to it again because Dr. Glasser likewise said that if the home is a success and the school a failure the child will succeed. The home is the cultural womb, temple, the psychological promoter for the educational process. If the educational environment of the home promotes, enhances, give top priority, applauds, insists on developing attitudes embracing the totality of the "education man," there is almost nothing the school can do that will destroy educational enthusiasm. If, on the other hand, the family life is caught in entanglement, snarls, bickering, racial prejudices, criticism of the public schools, criticism of black students, criticism of black teachers, and/or other elements in public schooling, then, it is a very difficult, if not impossible, task for either the family to promote the education enterprise or the public schools to provide a meaningful educational experience.

There is room for obvious disagreement surrounding Justice Haynesworth's decision especially coming in the middle of the school year. Parents, moreover, ought to examine, participate, involve, and even disagree with the way public schools are administered, curriculum employed, and teachers teach. But, the disagreement, polarizing of position, yes, the backfighting and the bickering should be kept in adult conversation and should not be allowed to permeate and perhaps truncate young minds engaged in the educational process. Parents, in their hostile resentment for racial integration — black students, black teachers — may be giving pupils, who are already experiencing difficulty, a crutch to lean on. Likewise, children are prone to become carriers of parental discretion which often ends in overt hostile confrontation on the school grounds. At best, racial prejudice is no promoter of the educational quest. At worst, it tears to pieces America's greatest contribution to Western civilization — the public schools.

Parents can and must provide quality educational leadership that will bridge the educational gap and provide the healing influence in this time of crisis.

Parents can enhance and promote the dignity and necessity of schooling by sharing problems with children in an understanding and reassuring confidence. They can listen to potential and real problems, agree with children that, yes, these are difficult times. Yes, meeting a new teacher will be different; becoming acquainted with a new class of children will raise immediate problems of insecurity. However, all the problems which we have mentioned will vanish in face of reassuring confidence and understanding parents. The conflicts will become insignificant in comparison to the wonderful opportunities. Quality educational leadership comes first and foremost and with greatest influence from parents. Parents must in the truest Socratic manner rise to the utmost of their intelligence and personal capacity and give direction to the circumstances instead of being controlled by them.

Finally, the first priority of public schooling is developing human potential. None of us — Boards of Education (collectively and individually), superintendent, principal, teacher, parents, students, and writers of this article — have begun to scratch the surface of our potential. We are so “hung up” on trivia — fear, insecurity, ego, race, bigotry, intolerance, etc., etc. — that we cannot free ourselves for creative living. William James has said that most people function at ten percent of their potential. Margaret Mead, Herbert Otto, and others suggest that people function at less than ten percent. Human potential is tied directly to personality. A child’s personality is molded, shaped, and developed through interaction with the types of people mentioned above in the market place of human existence. Positive interaction with positive people build positive personalities enhancing and magnifying human potential; negative influences reduce human potential. The algebraic formula for positive psychiatric dynamics is: Positive School Environment + Positive Home Environment = Positive Personality Development. This, we submit to you, is best done by *feeding the opportunities, and starving the problems.*

Let us give it a try.



